



Migration and Development: Building Migration into Development Strategies
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Session Six: Migration Partnerships

Overview

Research carried out by the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty (Migration DRC) has explored whether migration could be made significantly more efficient or less risky for international labour migrants through the development of partnerships at the international and national level. Broadly speaking, such partnerships include agreements between governments to better regulate migration, improved cooperation on migration issues between departments of national governments, and the integration of the private sector and civil society groups into migration policy. Such agreements hold the potential to improve the situation of migrants, but must be carefully constructed to avoid provoking unintended political consequences or creating additional risks for poor labour migrants.

Partnerships between sending and receiving countries

Bilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries can potentially ensure more orderly temporary labour migration by attempting to make it a formalised process. In general, such agreements should eliminate some of the exploitative practices which accompany informal migration and make it easier to promote labour migrants' rights. Where such agreements stipulate the number of labour migrants allowed to enter host countries, they should also have the advantage of making migration figures more predictable. This could bring some benefits to host countries, by ensuring businesses a known supply of overseas labour.

However, a 2004 Migration DRC study of bilateral agreements on labour migration that have been negotiated by Egypt and Morocco with a range of other countries, points to some of the difficulties states face in creating such agreements. Both Egypt and Morocco function primarily as sending countries, as they have significant pools of 'surplus labour' and a need for overseas remittances. Although both countries have signed diplomatic agreements regarding labour migration with a number of host countries, these agreements have often been based on private understandings which are not made public. This is partly because more formalised agreements on migration would have risked a political backlash in host countries. Furthermore, Migration DRC interviews showed that some government officials in Morocco and Egypt were hesitant about pursuing more formalised agreements on labour migration, fearing that such agreements might have had the unwanted consequence of making migration a more attractive option for skilled professionals.

Partnerships between sending countries

Competition among sending countries, particularly with regard to the recruitment of less skilled labour, can adversely affect both the wages and working conditions of labour migrants. Efforts by individual governments to create a fixed minimum wage for their low-skilled labour migrants working abroad have met with little success, as such measures are easily subverted by competing countries which provide workers at lower wages. Our research has been exploring whether bilateral or multilateral agreements between sending countries that set a common minimum wage for international migrants is one way to tackle this competition. This could potentially enhance the incomes of poor migrants who depend on international migration as a livelihood strategy. In some cases, such policies might be possible within the framework of existing multilateral agreements. For example, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, which includes seven governments, and the Economic Community of West African States, which includes 16 member-states, are both well-placed to lead initiatives designed to improve migration prospects for international labour migrants.

Coordination among ministries and agencies

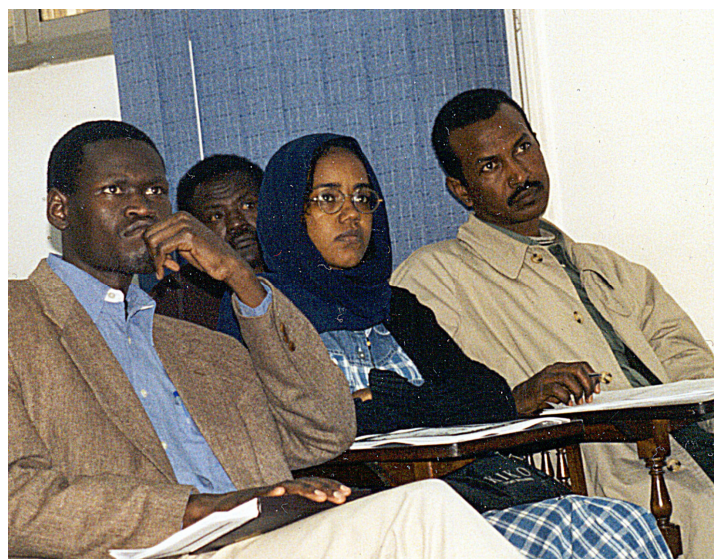
It is also important that sending governments ensure cooperation internally, as a number of departments and agencies under various ministries are involved with overseas employment in one way or another. There is often a lack of coordination among institutions at the field level, such as passport offices, police departments and emigration counters at airports. Such coordination among agencies is critical to providing quality services to migrant workers. In India, some

constituent states such as Kerala, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat have active policies addressing concerns of migrants, while other states essentially focus on attracting diaspora investment. It is important that relevant government officials are appropriately sensitised to the need to evolve and implement policies aimed at protecting the interests of all migrants, in addition to promoting investment from wealthier migrants based overseas.

Partnering with civil society and the private sector

There is often a significant gap in information provided to aspiring migrants, as well as current or returnee migrants. The lack of credible sources of information on overseas employment leads many labour migrants to depend on intermediaries, even though these are often far from impartial. Since 2004, the Government of Bangladesh has sought to tackle this issue by partnering with the recruitment industry and civil society institutions to provide pre-departure orientation programmes to prepare migrants for travel. These programmes have included cultural, linguistic and legal orientation with regard to prospective migrant-receiving countries. There is also a potential role for civil society organizations to play in host countries. A Migration DRC study in Egypt on irregular migrants working informally as domestic workers in Cairo suggests that these migrants' legal status makes them vulnerable to poor working conditions, exploitative wages and maltreatment. Among other things, this study suggests the need for Egyptian civil society organizations to highlight the plight of irregular domestic workers.

The private sector, meanwhile, has played an important role in facilitating migration in most South Asian countries. A Migration DRC study found that this was also the case in Egypt and Morocco, where the private sector functions as the *de facto* authority on migration. In such contexts, there is the potential for greater public-private collaboration. Information held by private recruiting institutions could be significant in understanding aspects of migration such as: the profile of those intending to migrate, the job search patterns of migrants and the changing profile of demand in the labour markets of receiving countries. Sharing this information could aid governments who are seeking to better regulate migration processes.



Improving labour migrants' services

Egyptian migrants watch a film about life in Finland during a pre-departure orientation programme. Photo © IOM.

Pathways for policy

The Migration DRC's studies point to a number of possible partnership areas for governments to explore, including:

- bilateral agreements between sending and receiving countries, which may reduce the vulnerabilities of migrant workers and better regulate migration flows;
- multilateral agreements among sending nations, which should be considered as a way to reduce competition that negatively impacts migrants' pay and working conditions;
- policies which promote increased synergy among government agencies, which could help streamline migration processes to the benefit of migrant workers;
- agreements between governments and private or civil society partners, which can improve services to migrants and provide governments with information which allows them to better regulate migration processes.

For more information

To find out more about Migration DRC's research please email us at migration@sussex.ac.uk. Access to Migration DRC's working papers is available at www.migrationdrc.org.

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